

# LIMERICK SOCIALIST

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**THE  
VOICE  
OF THE  
WORKER**

*'That which is good for the working class I esteem patriotic . . .'* James Connally

## LABOUR IN VAIN



THE WORKERS' REPUBLIC?

THE NEW REPUBLIC?



70's WILL BE SOCIALIST?

## A CAPITALIST COALITION!

# SAVOY CABBAGES WITH GAMMON

BY DERMOT McEVOY

LIMERICK THANKS the Irish Labour Party for its choice of venue for annual conference. It's good for trade – and trading. Delegates will be greeted courteously by Mayor Senator Russell (flour, oil and guano) because (to quote Percy French) "In these parts, sez she; they have warrum hearts, sez she".

Socialists must not put out black flags just because they will not be represented at this gathering of the talents in the Savoy Cinema: the show must go on. Perhaps a little crepe, perhaps a black tie, certainly nothing that might offend Chief Supt. Kenny, or incite the friends of Michael Murphy who was interrogated for 17 hours in the local barracks and oddly marked by a wattle on his left arm. (The Chief Super has been too busy since to reply to the *Limerick Leader* allegations, which we merely repeated, that Murphy apparently masochistically beat himself; an acrobatic feat if there ever was one). But no black flags.

To return to Percy French and the late Madame Gonne McBride, incidentally a Freeman of the City of Limerick, and the new King of the Labour Party (Roddy, Brendan, Stephen or Thady?)! "That Maude Gonne, sez she/Dhressing in black, sez she/To welcome be back, sez she/And all that gammon, sez she/About me bringing famine, sez she".

Of course, the Labour Party has not brought famine to the urban poor; it has fought manfully (as you will be told) to stop their dreadful Fine Gael partners, apparently a lesser breed inside the law, from doing so.

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We are, as Socialists, entitled to ask how manfully? Butter has just gone up another 4p, cheese another 6p, beef another 3p, rates are rising into the great blue yonder and mortgages . . . But it is, we are told, all to help the farmers. The "small" – and I don't mean low-sized-farmers – are relieved of rates, as against the small, or low-sized, urban dweller who either pays the extra rates through an addition on his rent or, if he's lucky(?) enough to be an owner-occupier, directly. The regrettable thing is really that we are invited to congratulate Justin Keating, the Shelbourne Hotel Marxist, that but for his intervention the increases would have been steeper. How steep is cheek?

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Marie Antoinette, when the poor of Paris were demanding bread, said, we were told, "Let'em eat cake!" Untrue, according to the more reliable historians of the French Revolution, but what is true, is that she had her head chopped off by the Monsieur de Paris of the time. Now, I don't want Keating's head chopped off, but he and his cohorts in the Coalition might keep their tongues in their cheeks. When, we Socialists, asked for bread, as we do ask, we are offered not apochryphal cake but a Green Paper! A Green Paper that promises 60,000 more jobs; a promise, which, if fulfilled or fulfillable, will not even accommodate the numbers of school-leavers coming on the labour market, let alone make inroads into the numbers of permanently unemployed. Wrap the Green Paper round me boys to die were far more sweet . . .!

FROM JACK LYNCH, the Fianna Fail leader, and his £100,000 colleague Charles Haughey, and, natch, your friend and mine Herbert-Scherbert, comes a promise of thousands of new jobs (exact figures not stated) "for teachers, Gardai,

medical personnel and young people" if – and here's the Catch 22, 23 and 24 – Fianna Fail were in Government. He would, he said, according to the *Evening Pravda* (Truth in the News) borrow another £100 million to do it. From whom and at what rate of interest? Perhaps he knows some friendly Lockheed managers or Arabs or Gulf Oil men whom Dr. Garret FitzGerald has not already tapped-legitimately – to the tune of our £1,000 million indebtedness?

From Paddy Lane, the kindly Clareman who heads our kindly farmers, comes abother suggestion "there must be a standstill in wages". No mention of a standstill in cattle prices or that farmers should pay Income Tax like everyone else who happens to be lucky enough to be working, or that to help the urban poor this winter there should be a £10 a head levy on every beast on every farm NOW.

Still, it won't matter all that much very soon. The game is up. The Capitalist game. *Rien na va plus*. Lady Lavery is now the bearded lady of the circus: Ah, do please stand back and let the ladies see the monkeys, ah do please stand back; the higher up the monkey goes the more the ladies can see the monkeys, ah do please stand back.

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Any better off in Northern Ireland? Or in mainland United Kingdom? According to a *Sunday Times* Business News Survey unemployment in Strabane among men is 35.5 per cent, in Dungannon 25.5, in Newry 25.3, in Londonderry (or Derry, take your pick) 21.3. According to the IRA and Dr. Newman these are areas which we should take over; "there won't be any peace until the British leave", says his Lordship.

Presumably, Dr. Newman, now that he has thrown his biretta into the ring, he and the Provos will be able to tell the electorate how the Republic can deal with these fresh problems. Concentrations camps? The auto-da-fe? Perhaps soup? Dr. Conor Cruise O'Brien, and he's not alone, thinks there will be a massacre if the Brits leave. A Final Solution, Dr. Newman?

If Dr. Newman, in his new role as politician, thinks that Dr. O'Brien and his colleagues are wrong and that he is right he should give us more information. Perhaps he will also tell us why Ireland is the ONLY country in the world where avowed Christians go round killing each other and apparently liking it? Or is it all to be kept in the archives like why Dr. Newman's illustrious predecessor, Dr. E.T. O'Dwyer, denied the Sacraments to the Christian Brothers at Bruff and made one 78-year-old Brother walk a mile and a half uphill to the parish church because it was improper that men should hear Mass in the presence of NUNS! The recodes of the Brothers' appeal to Rome – and its rejection – will make interesting reading. Not that I approve of the hitting in the face of one of Dr. O'Dwyer's priests with a pig's liver by an incensed parishioner is the answer. Surely a lamb's liver would have been more appropriate? (If you don't believe this happened, consult the National Library in Dublin: it says "See Colindale" and I've seen the *Limerick Leader* at Colindale of those days. And, still in parenthesis, a loyal Limerick Catholic of today said 'I found it all most disturbing'). Political statements, Dr. Newman, should be left to politicians, or the laity might start to question Theology as taught at Maynooth which, thanks to a Mr. Burke, is now apparently a University. God help us!

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BUT, let us revert to another Channel: Dr. Conor Cruise



**PART  
22**

**BY  
P.J. RYAN**

### THE DIEHARDS PLAN THEIR RETREAT

The long day of inaction by the Staters in not indulging in target practice against the Ordinance Barracks gave rise to rumours in the city that a parley or high-ranking conference was in session between the opposing parties. It was known that there were three generals of the national army in the city. They had been created generals by the authority of the Provisional Government. There were innumerable generals in the Diehard camp; they had been created generals by their own authority and were self-perpetuating. Because of this in any conference between the opposing parties the Diehards would always be in the majority and win every vote. On this account no conference was held between the opposing parties. There were some private talks between individuals, but no formal conference.

Meanwhile, the people living in Watergate, in the Irishtown, in Palmerstown, and in the adjoining streets and lanes held by the Staters, relaxed and enjoyed themselves; they had started the rumours. Some people fished the Abbey river from Matthew Bridge to Baal's Bridge. Their weighty catches of trout, eel and peal helped to vary their diet. In 1922 the last known shoal of mackerel came up the Shannon with the tide.

During the conflict there was a tacit agreement that no shooting should occur between ten at night and ten next morning, but this agreement was not rigidly adhered to. Both parties fired on the romantic principle, better to have fired and missed than never to have fired at all.

The result of this joyous, carefree shooting was that bullets were flying in all directions. Because of this erratic shooting every window facing a line of fire was covered by a loosely hung blanket which deflected random bullets; these blankets were now removed. The streets and squares were thronged with spectators watching games of Gaelic-soccer and Gaelic-rugby played by true Gaels who so far with courage and humour had endured three weeks of target practice against them. The game then called Shillelagh was not played in the ancient city on that day of non-aggression.

Towards dusk all those fishermen and spectators were warned to keep away from the Abbey River. They were told that a fleet of angling cots loaded with armed men might come sweeping down the river from the Island, like the spear-armed Vikings of long ago. Some people demurred, pointing out that, as the Staters held the railway bridge crossing the Shannon and controlled the Abbey river from that point to where it joined the Shannon again at Matthew Bridge, it was impossible for the Diehards to escape from the Castle Barracks by the Abbey river. Those who protested were informed that all precautions must be taken. As the British had almost spooned the Diehards with guns and explosives, it was possible that the British had also given them an armoured boat capable of navigating the Abbey river at high tide. In that non-technical age there were many credulous people who accepted that simple explanation.

As the long day wore on there was an exchange of views between the three barracks. Drove of men got through the enemy lines and reached the Castle, the Ordinance and the New barracks. Those intrepid men carried despatches. The carrying of despatches was an important function before and during the Civil War. Many thousands often received pensions and medals for carrying despatches during that period.

The summary of those despatches was Limerick must be excluded from the joys of the Republic. The Ancient City Studied in the Arts of War must be abandoned to its fate. To this end every form of transport was to be used to remove all military stores from the three barracks. It was agreed that by transport or by trot the Diehards would advance into the

# The Fourth Siege of Limerick

towns and villages of County Limerick; there in the open fields and under the open sky they would stand and defend the Republic. Should the Staters dare to follow them they would have to advance in the open like men and not like tricksters breaking through walls or cellars and making flank attacks without giving due notice of their intentions. When these plans became known to the citizens they applauded the noble sentiments and laughed at the brave conceit.

### THE BURNING OF THE BARRACKS

On the night of Thursday 20 July the Staters had their usual number of men manning the barricades. All other men were bedded down in moderate comfort, resting before the morrow's big push. With chromatic exactitude the sentries on the barricades noted a strange red glow or false dawn in the sky at 1.30 a.m. The officers and men were roused from their sleep and scouting parties were sent beyond the barricades; they returned with the news that all three barracks were in flames and that the Diehards were advancing into County Limerick. As it was a dark cloudy night, it was assumed that the Diehards would need the light of the burning barracks to light them on their way.

It was and is the custom to celebrate the first day of May by lighting bonfires on the previous night in honour of the pagan deity Beltane; as those fires had not been lighted on the appointed day, some people assumed that the burning of the barracks was a belated act of homage to Baal and thus was this night called Bonfire Night. Men in uniform cannot run away from combat and conceal themselves without earning the scorn and contempt of those from whom they seek sanctuary; armed civilians can happily do so with impunity and, because of doubts as to their status, receive humane consideration; later they may volubly defend and prove the heroism of their actions.

The armed forces of the Republic had left the city; should the Staters exercise imprudent haste in pursuit, they would be splendid targets against the background of leaping flames from the burning barracks. The Staters exercised prudent caution and sent out patrols to prevent the unauthorised removal of property from unoccupied buildings and rested for the night. They had no ambition to pursue a night time willow-wisp or vanishing army.

The thunderous noise of unsilenced lorries moving from the New Barracks, the shouts of command of the sentries patrolling the streets, as well as the smoke and crackling noise of the flames from the burning barracks, aroused the citizens and they flocked on to the streets.

As the citizens were prevented from travelling around by the patrols and sentries, their minds were given over to wild surmise. In a city with a history going back almost two thousand years, the people have long memories. The leaping flames, the billowing smoke, the smell of burning bacon and other foods, and the yellow red glow and heat from the burning barracks, recalled to the minds of many the golden age of Murrough of the Burnings. The monks who wrote most of the early history of their times would scarce do him justice.

Murrough of the Burnings, royal descendant of Brian Boru, on coming into his inheritance, found his territory cluttered up with monasteries and monks who would not defend

themselves against marauding invaders nor pay tribute to him their Lord and Master. With fire and sword he burnt them from the land and made his territory fit for a king to call his own.

Murrough of the Burnings and men like him were true patrons of the arts; they were the country's first landscape artists: they gave the country those romantic looking monastic ruins which delight the eyes of tourists and blend so well with the scenery. Those ruins are scenic evidence of the stranglehold of the monks on the country in that remote age.

As the Diehards sped on by lorry or on foot on that dark night under the open sky, the open sky opened more so and a deluge of rain drenched their clothes and dampened their militant ardour. Men footslogging towards Patrickswell and Adare as well as the many lorryloads of men careering towards Cork and Kerry, took shelter from the downpour. When the storm had passed and the journey resumed, many men who had been anchored to the republican belief had broke loose from their moorings and were adrift in the wastes of the waterlogged countryside. Many weary, wet, bedraggled warriors had headed for home; their cherished republican ideals had vanished in the darkness. The time was now moving on towards four a.m. In the east those wandering minstrels could see the dawn's early light. A more cherished ideal than

the Republic was to be dryshod and to have a warm dry place to sleep. Home went the heroes to dry, to sleep, perchance to dream.

All of these events occurred on the night of Thursday 20 July 1922.

On the morning of Friday 21st July, while the three barracks were still smouldering, a man armed with a two-gallon tin of petrol entered the New Barracks by the gate in the iron railings above Edward Street and set on fire the military hospital which had escaped the flames of the night before. On coming out of the gate he was set upon by some angry citizens and would have been kicked to death but for the arrival of a patrol of Staters who saved him from mob violence.

Wounded military prisoners are usually confined in military hospitals to protect them from themselves or from the violence of their associates. Because of the burning of the military hospital, the Staters took over a wing of the city workhouse in which to treat their own wounded and their wounded prisoners. Because of this use of the workhouse hospital, some of the Staters guarding the hospital were shot dead in preventing the rescue of some prisoners who were likewise shot dead. From this incident it is clear that patriots can create a lot of misfortune for themselves and others.

(To be continued).

## FAMILY PLANNING IN LIMERICK

### PART TWO

BY CARMEN CULLEN

The first steps towards the formation of the Limerick Family Planning Clinic were taken when, following a pledge the election manifesto, two meetings were called by Jim Kemmy, late in 1975. From these meetings an Association membership list was drawn up and a committee formed to plan and organise a family planning clinic. An office was rented and in February of this year the Limerick Family Planning Clinic opened its doors. The Clinic held four sessions per week, and provided an immediate alternative for the people of the region who would otherwise have had to travel to Dublin or Cork.

The service was widely welcomed from its inception. The Clinic is run on a voluntary basis, and advises on methods not requiring a doctor's prescription. The extension of this service to provide a full medical service is imminent. This extension will cover doctor's advice on the pill, and a full range of other contraceptive methods.

The L.F.P.C. Clinic interprets family planning as meaning exactly what it says, planning how many children a couple are going to have and when they are going to have them. In all cases the word couple is used deliberately as conception involves both sexes and implies the need for joint responsibility.

A survey recently conducted on behalf of the *Sunday Independent* showed that 45% of those questioned believed that contraceptives should be available to consenting couples. An understanding of the possibility of attaining control in this most crucial area through more efficient methods has encouraged a growing number of Irish people to visit the family planning clinics. In Limerick the number of people who avail of the service is rapidly increasing and this movement is an expression of the great need for such a service in this region.

Family planning is a subject which, up to recently was only vaguely understood by the vast majority of Irish people. Since many people in Limerick had not had the opportunity to become familiar with the idea and principles involved, it might be a help to give a brief outline of the methods advised upon in the Clinic and the medical nature of their use.

In this country we close our eyes to the fact that hundreds of Irish girls cross to England every year to avail of the provisions of the British Abortion Act (1968). It is interesting to note that the greatest abortion problems arise in

predominantly Catholic or Communist countries, rather than the more liberal ones, such as Britain or Sweden.

One of the primary functions of the Irish Family Planning Association is to try to reduce the increasing number of Irish women who undergo abortions in Britain every year. To remove the social stigma still attached to illegitimacy pressures must be applied on the Government to provide an adequate back-up service for single pregnant women. Effective contraception provided for women who need it and who want it is another means of reducing the toll. It is better to prevent pregnancy by contraception than to sacrifice an unwanted foetus by aborting it. In Ireland because of the Government's refusal to legislate on the right to avail of contraceptives, men and women are in the unhappy position where this unavailability is a direct cause of unwanted pregnancies and subsequent abortions.

While our legislators anguish over this issue Irish girls flee to Britain to their own particular private hell. To change the law is not to force women to use contraceptives, merely to allow them to meet their needs without breaking the law.

The advice offered and methods suggested by the L.F.P.C. are based on the principle that pregnancy can be prevented and families planned by the knowledge and use of contraceptives.

(To be continued)

## YOUR CONFERENCE RESOLUTION

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# NOTES ON THE TRAVELLING PEOPLE

by JOHN CASEY

## PART TWO

### RELIGION AND MARRIAGE

All but 30 of the itinerants recorded in the 1960 census stated that they were Catholics; the 30 were Protestant. Travelling people are not remarkable church-goers, although they will take pains to see that the children receive Holy Communion and Confirmation. Their non-attendance at Church has often been dictated by the shabbiness of their dress and the hostility of settled people but undoubtedly their general non-conformism has also been a factor. Non-attendance is sometimes rationalised for the children by telling them that because they are children of the road they are not required to attend. Taking into account their living conditions and deprived way of life, it is rather sad that non-attendance at church should be held against them but it is. There was the parish priest in a West Limerick town who, refusing a teacher the use of the primary school for afternoon classes for adult illiterates, sealed his decision with the remark, "Sure the devils never go to Mass".

Their religious beliefs manifest themselves in their love of gaudy religious pictures, sacred heart lamps and plastic crosses.

In Tralee there is a quarter known as the Bullring where travelling people and their descendants have been settled for more than 20 years. Prior to the feast of Corpus Christi, houses are painted and religious pictures and plaster statues decorated with flowers are placed on windows. The high point is reached on the evening prior to the feast when two life-size plaster statues of The Madonna and Joseph the Worker are carried from the shed where they have been kept during the year and placed at an appointed spot. Vases and pots of flowers are placed around the bases.

The census figures for 1960 and 1961 showed that travelling people marry young. Between 74% and 76% of male itinerants were married before the age of 25, while less than 22% of the settled population were married at that age. More remarkable still are the figures for the girls: between 37% and 40% of female itinerant marriages took place under the age of 18; this compares with 1.4% for girls in the settled population.

The traditional form of marriage among the travellers was "jumping the budget". But this would seem to have almost completely disappeared and has been replaced by a church ceremony. A marriage is an occasion for a family gathering for feasting and drinking. Wealthy travellers use it for an ostentatious display of wealth. At a tinkers' wedding in England, some years ago, an enormous wedding cake attracted the attention of the British and Irish papers. The parents give the newly-weds a dowry in accordance with their means. But the itinerant parents of another young couple getting married in Limerick shortly afterwards went one better. The specially made wedding cake was the biggest ever seen in the city, and a hole had to be cut in the ceiling of the reception room to allow the top tiers of the cake to pass through.

In the fifties and sixties the average young couple started off with a tent and a spring cart and only the children of the well-to-do would begin married life with a horse and caravan. Marriages take place between first, second and third cousins. There are consensual unions between deserted wives and single men; some swapping goes on and some unions have never been churched or legalised.

At the wedding there is a master of ceremonies. This man is the natural leader of a group. Unlike the gypsies, there are no tribal chiefs, no voivodes, no tribal elections. Natural leaders emerge within groups, men distinguished by their bearing, their courage, sagacity or 'scholarship'. The travelling people frequently use the word 'scholar' in conversation, referring respectfully to one of their number as a 'scholar'. Amongst them it means simply a literate person. It is the scholar who writes letters and reads newspapers. From time to time members of the Wards, a Galway family, have claimed to be the 'kings of the tinkers', but travelling people emphatically deny that they have any king.

Only about 10% of itinerants claim to be children of parents one of whom was not a traveller. They intermarry but, in spite of this and considering that their total number does not exceed 6,000, there is no remarkable evidence of the ill-effects of intermarriage. Travelling people are remarkably free from mental illness, all the more remarkable considering the harsh and depressing living conditions. Mobility and a preoccupation with basic bodily needs probably contribute to this but no proper study has been made.

The authorities claim that there is very little promiscuity among travellers.

The cinema has always been a favourite place of entertainment as it did not require literacy. Girls are accompanied to and from by their brothers. A careful watch is kept on girls and young women by their guardians which, considering the crowded living conditions in which they live, is necessary to prevent incest and unwanted pregnancies. Teenage couples, having been refused permission to marry, run away together. They are brought home but if they persist in their desire to marry, the parents generally accede. The gypsies punish a woman for adultery by beating and shaving her head. Adultery amongst the travelling people has been the reason for some of the most savage and bitter feuds. Gypsy women wash their breasts and suckle their babies in public. Their Irish counterparts stay closer to the traditional modesty of the settled population. Sterility is seen as a curse by the gypsies and attributed to carnal intercourse with vampires. Childless itinerant couples fight shy of discussing the problem with doctors. Settlement committees have done valuable work here in sending such couples to clinics. (To be continued).

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An ancient chamber in a tower  
With a pointed beehive shape  
Was the setting,  
Where the steady-spoken lyric  
From a woman's lips  
Hypnotised that crowd,  
And the foreign hum of cars  
Faded into silence  
As the gathering were captured  
By the long forgotten history  
Of those bare stone walls.

In that darkness half-diluted  
By the candles stuck  
In the bottles round the walls,  
Colour, shape and stature  
Lost all certainty,  
And the eager faces looking on  
Might have been those  
Of courtesan and warrior  
Recovering from the strain  
Of a day's campaign.

But then we left through  
The great black bolt-studded door  
And the ageless spell  
That woman wore was shattered  
By the noise of countless engines  
And the eerie orange lights  
Along the street.

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# LIMERICK 'LABOUR' PAINS



Since 1969 the Labour Party's official policy has called for the availability of a comprehensive family planning service. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions' *Women's Charter* has also called for the provision of full family planning facilities. Even Jack Lynch, the Fianna Fail leader, speaking at the adjournment Dail debate in 1974 said:

*I believe and want to make known my personal position, that there are personal circumstances, for example for valid health and social reasons, and where religious beliefs or conscientious convictions allow, in which people ought to have reasonable access to the use of contraceptives.*

In the light of this background one would be forgiven for believing that the Labour Party members of the Limerick City Council would give at least token support to the principle of family planning. But such is not the case.

In September of this year the Limerick Family Planning Association circulated an open letter to the press to be signed by, among other people, the Labour members of the City Council. The letter read as follows:

*Public attitudes to family planning have altered significantly in recent years. The need to plan families in a responsible and safe manner has now become universally acknowledged.*

*An increasing number of Irish people are demanding full access to family planning facilities as a basic civil and human right. This demand has expressed itself in a number of ways*

*and through a variety of organisations. Political parties, trade unions, religious bodies, medical associations, women's movements, tenants' associations, and many individual citizens have all called for changes in the existing laws to provide for a comprehensive family planning service.*

*Since the McGee Supreme Court decision, it has become possible to import and distribute contraceptives throughout the country, but their SALE is still illegal. There is need for an immediate change in this situation. It is a denial of democracy to prohibit the sale of contraceptives to couples who wish to plan their families through the use of the family planning*



*facilities of their choice.*

*The undersigned support the right of Irish people to plan their families and call on the Government to introduce legislation to provide for the full availability and public sale of contraceptives.*

Despite the fact that the Independent member, Michael Crowe, had no hesitation in signing the document all the Labour members refused to sign. Some people could perhaps have expected that such "Labour" men as the two Coughlans, Frank Leddin and Mick Lipper would not have the guts to put their names to the letter but what about that well known Irish Transport and General Workers Union official, Frank Prendergast? When asked to sign, Frank Prendergast said he had "some reservations" about the contents of the document and of its effects and also refused to sign. With these "Labour" men in action, is it any wonder that the Labour Party is so backward and cowardly in carrying out its published policies.

## A LABOUR OF LOVE

A few weeks ago two determined Dublin workers arrived in Limerick to carry out a mission. They were employees of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union and their journey to Limerick had been ordered by the Union's Head office. On arrival the men set about their task without ceremony. They immediately went to the office at 91, O'Connell Street. High on the wall was a timber board bearing the legend 'Steve Coughlan'. The workers did not delay; with a few deft movements of their tools, the wooden sign was ripped from the wall and tumbled to the ground. Their mission accomplished, the workers left for Dublin to report to their Union officers.

About two years ago, through some skillful manoeuvrings, Coughlan secured the basement offices of the I.T.G.W.U. hall for use as a "clinic". With his usual extravagant style, he proceeded to erect a sign with its letters dwarfing the Union's own name. Soon local people became to refer to Limerick's Connolly Hall as being "above Steve Coughlan's office!"

This proved too much for the Union's Dublin leadership. Now moves are afoot to have Bookie Coughlan removed from

the building altogether.

The story of how the political refugee, Coughlan, wormed his way into the Labour Party after two unsuccessful attempts to enter the Dail as a Clann na Poblachta candidate is well known. His admittance and the repeated refusals of the party to expel him for his sectarian and anti-socialist statements tell more about the weakness of Labour than about Coughlan himself.

However, like the pitcher being brought to the well once too often, Coughlan's days as a serious politician are numbered. His attempt to foist his son, Thadyboy, on the people of Limerick has already been clearly rejected by public opinion. Like an old tired and discredited dog, Stevie himself has to take to the hard road at the forthcoming general election. That road will prove a bit too hard for him.

Coughlan has hopes of the election being his last hurrah; instead, it will be his last political whimper. The removal of his sign is a good omen for his own removal from the Limerick political scene.

# A letter to Dr. Newman

Since there are only seven more weeks to Christmas, and the exorbitant price of turkey (nearly twice what it was last year) puts it beyond the reach of many poor people and Social Welfare benefits and wages are "frozen", (which means in real terms that our income is actually reduced) and with the price of basic commodities going ever upwards, and with democracy being threatened by the introduction of draconian laws to curb the "Holy War" being fought by the Provos, I thought that this month I might set forth my views by writing an open letter to the Catholic Bishop of Limerick, Dr. Jeremiah Newman. So here goes.

Dear Dr. Newman,

I am writing this letter from a two-bedroomed Corporation house in Southill. The reason I am writing to you is that you have been very vocal of late on many moral issues which affect my own and my family's existence and the future welfare of my children.

For example, by your condemnation of planned and responsible parenthood by means of contraception, you try to coerce the Irish Parliament into continuing to deny me a basic human right which is now established throughout most of the civilised world — the exceptions of course being a few notoriously reactionary "Catholic" countries. You will of course defend your right to do this on vague theological and "moral" grounds and I would readily accept that you have such a right were it not for your blatant inconsistency in voicing your opinions on other moral issues.

Is it not a moral issue, deserving of your attention, that a mere five per cent of the population of this country own seventy-five per cent of the wealth? ("Wealth" being the product of the labours of the other ninety-five per cent). Is it not a moral issue that at the present moment there are over 110,000 Irish workers unemployed through no fault of their own? Is it not a moral issue that our educational facilities are the most backward in Europe? Is it not a moral issue that some poor people who can ill afford it are still required to pay for medical services? I could go on and on but I'm sure, Dr. Newman, that you know what I mean, though I doubt that you will be capable of any real response.

Indeed, how can you be EXPECTED to understand the plight of your fellow Irish citizens? You live in the lap of luxury in an imposing mansion on a six-acre estate which is probably one of the most "desirable" sites in the province of Munster and is estimated to be valued at about half a million pounds (£500,000). You drive around like Royalty in a big Mercedes and have your annual Continental holidays. At the same time you preach charity and love.

Would it not be an act of "True Christian Charity" if you were to sell one or two acres of your estate and give the money to the Bawnmore Centre for handicapped children now that our capitalist Government has decided to abandon these same children? Indeed, why not sell your entire estate and go and live with the people you "love"? I'm sure the Corporation would oblige you with a house in Southill, even though there are eight hundred families more eligible than yourself already on the waiting list. (You would of course have to run the risk



of having your Mercedes kicked by wandering norses!)

Then there is the question of your oblique support for the Provisional IRA, often referred to as the "Pope's Army", and their "Holy War" against the North's Protestant community. Did you ever stop to think that your irresponsible utterances only serve to encourage headstrong young men (already conditioned by YOUR schools) to join the Provos in their sectarian bombings and shootings and kneecappings in the strife-torn and tragic Northern Ireland.

From an electoral and democratic point of view, the Provos, like the Catholic Church, are unrepresentative of the people of this country. The people do not elect the Army Council of the Provos any more than they do the Hierarchy. Thus these two groups should not purport to speak on behalf of the people.

As a socialist I believe that all people should have the right to support and practise the religion of their choice, as well as the right to have no religion or to oppose religion. But I also believe that no religious grouping should be permitted to frustrate the social progress of a nation or to sabotage human rights.

Finally, it is said that an Irish Bishop will never go hungry and will never be told the truth. Well, I certainly have no desire that you should ever go hungry (you are always welcome to my house for a feed of packet and tripe). But I hope that in this letter I will have succeeded in breaching that formidable protective wall around your estate and in getting just a little bit of the truth across to you in the comfort of your ivory tower.

Yours sincerely,  
Jack Cantillon

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